

A CALL TO CIVILITY AND COMMUNITY

Ground Rules for Respectful Public Discourse and Behavior

“Frequent recurrence to fundamental principles is essential to the security of individual rights and perpetuity of free government.” Constitution of Utah Article I Section 27

Being concerned about growing incivility in our civic and public settings we call upon the people of Utah to return to fundamental principles that will lead to greater civility and a new spirit of community. Among our “inherent and inalienable” Constitutional rights is the fundamental right “to communicate freely about our thoughts and opinions”, and yet we are also “responsible for the abuse of that right” Constitution of Utah Article I Section 1. In that context we believe that there must be a renewal of respectful discourse and behavior in civic and public settings in Utah.

This is not an appeal for us all simply to get along. We recognize that there are profound differences among us and that spirited debate is a vital part of American democracy. Participation in American civic and public life does not require us to sacrifice our deepest convictions; rather we best protect our own rights by protecting the rights of others and adhering to high ethical standards.

With that in mind we propose the following ground rules of civic and public engagement that recognize the important place of the rights, responsibilities and respect inherent in our civic and constitutional compact.

- 1. Remember the Importance of Rights and the Dignity of Each Individual.** Our society is founded upon the proposition that that all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and that freedom of conscience and expression are at the foundation of our rights.
- 2. Responsibly Exercise your Rights While Protecting the Rights of Others.** Each of us should be responsible both in the exercise of our rights and in protecting the rights of others. Especially on matters of personal faith, claims of conscience, and human rights, public policy should seek solutions that are fair to all.
- 3. Respect Others.** All people - especially our leaders and the media - should demonstrate a commitment to be respectful in discourse and behavior, particularly in civic and public forums. Respect should also be shown by being honest and as inclusive as possible, by mindfully listening to and attempting to understand the concerns of others, by valuing their opinions even when there is disagreement, and by addressing their concerns when possible.
- 4. Refrain from Incivility.** Public discourse can be passionate while maintaining mutual respect that reaches beyond differing opinions. Intimidation, ridicule, personal attacks, mean spiritedness, reprisals against those who disagree, and other disrespectful or unethical behaviors destroy the fabric of our society and can no longer be tolerated. Those who engage in such behavior should be brought to light, held accountable and should no longer enjoy the public’s trust.
- 5. Rekindle Building Community.** Our social compact “of the people” and “by the people” is “for the people.” Each one of us has a responsibility to build community. On divisive issues, areas of common ground should first be explored. Effort should be given to building broad-based agreement, giving due regard to the concerns of minority points of view.

We invite all Utahns to join us in affirming these ground rules and putting them into action.

The time has come for us to work together.